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Human rights bodies and mechanisms

Written statement* submitted by the International Career Support Association, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[27 August 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The Keystone of East Asia

Lying in the East China Sea with a population of 1.4 million people, Okinawa Prefecture has historically been Japanese territory, and the people are the same ethnically, culturally, and linguistically. These facts are easily confirmed academically. In addition, Okinawa, like the other prefectures of Japan, has enjoyed political stability, a high degree of democracy, and all the benefits of freedom as a part of Japan. Furthermore, as a developed nation, Japan enjoys one of the highest qualities of life in Asia.

Okinawa was previously a poor area with no industrial base, but its socio-economic situation has greatly developed due to the special support given by the central government as a result of Japan's own economic development. Okinawa's health care, education, welfare, and culture, backed by Japan's high standards of social infrastructure, make them world-class. The central government has provided more than 11 trillion yen to Okinawa Prefecture in the years since its reversion to Japan, and the government has previously pledged to continue this generous support in the future as well. Okinawa's population has doubled compared to the prewar, which symbolizes not only Okinawa's prosperity but the fact that Okinawa is a good place in which to live.

Despite these facts, deliberately incorrect information about Okinawa is being spread internationally. According to these sources, the people of Okinawa are being hurtfully discriminated against by the central government. Moreover, the presence of American bases in Okinawa, as per the Japan-U.S. Treaty of Mutual Cooperation and Security, is, according to these views, an overwhelming and intolerable burden on the people of Okinawa. These assertions are fictitious and untruthful, however, filled with political motivations.

I am a resident of Okinawa Prefecture, born and raised here. As a citizen of Japan, I am deeply worried about the misleading information of Okinawa that is being spread internationally. This is because these wrong impressions lead to incorrect opinions internationally. These opinions could lead to actions taken that will not be to Okinawa's benefit, and could actually harm it. In the United Nations of all places, it is imperative that correct information be relayed. The United Nations plays an important role in international society, but if the United Nations works from mistaken assumptions, it is in danger of losing its prestige and the trust toward it in the international community. This would signify a deep loss for the world.

So let's look at the facts, versus what the secessionists are saying. First is the propaganda that the residents of Okinawa Prefecture, Japan, are actually an indigenous minority people. This is a politically charged opinion held by a handful of individuals, and is not supported academically. These individuals claim that the Ryukyu dialect, one of several dialects in the Japanese language, is its own language, but this, too, is not supported by linguistic studies. Falsely stating the structure of the language is different—when in fact it is the same—is evidence that it is being done for political, not learned, reasons.

Itokazu Keiko, an Upper House member of the National Parliament from Okinawa, stated at the United Nations World Conference on Indigenous Rights and at the United Nations Human Rights Council that the people of Okinawa Prefecture are an indigenous people, that the Japanese and U.S. governments have forced the bases on the people, that they are experiencing persecution, etc., but have not supported their assertions with any scholarly findings. One special characteristic is that her claims are identical to the interests of China. Interestingly, although she claims to be interested in protecting the rights of the people of Okinawa Prefecture, she does not protest when China militarily pressures Okinawa or violates its territorial waters. She is applying double standards, and appears to be simply representing Chinese interests. It is not only her; the local newspapers in Okinawa, local scholars and commentators share a stance that is anti-Japan, anti-U.S., and pro-China. Their statements tend to be completely lacking in fairness or balance, and often are lies and outright fabrications. This tendency is particularly bad with regard to commentary about U.S. bases in Okinawa. The relocation of U.S. Marine Corps Air Station to Camp Schwab being pursued by the two national governments at the request of local leaders is meant to remove the danger of an airfield being located proximity to a city that has grown up around it, and will increase the safety of the residents by moving near the coastline farther north in a sparsely populated area. In addition, many of the U.S. facilities, both numerically and area-wise, are also destined to be returned, which should in theory be supported by the anti-base forces, but have actually been opposed, thus, paradoxically preventing substantial land returns.

This contradiction exists because the real objective of the above individuals is to rid Okinawa of U.S. bases, in particular the U.S. Marine Corps. They become forced to tell a lie, as if they were "anti-war, peace activists," when in fact their motives are deeper than that. This is clear by the fact that if they were truly interested in resolving the safety issue surrounding the air station than they would support its relocation, but instead they misrepresent the relocation as the construction of a "new base" and thus oppose it. The relocation has been proceeding, but professional protesters have done all they can to interfere with it. These activities go against Japanese law, and are illegal. The protesters, therefore, who are subject to arrest, instead make charges of oppression by the government acting extra-constitutionally or state other outright lies. They are able to get away with these accusations due in part to having the full support of the local newspapers and mass media, as well as the fact the local media essentially has sway over public debate of issues through its ability to control the flow of information. In this sense, it is necessary for the international community to objectively analyze the information that comes from Okinawa via the media. Alternative or conservative views, critical of the ideology and actions of the so-called peace movement, or in support of the national government or U.S. bases, are not found in the newspapers, its commentaries, or its editorials. The lack of balance and objectivity prevents a balanced discussion, and hence the only information that is presented is warped and skewed, with the image being presented of Okinawa as oppressed and abused when nothing further is the case. This occurs in part because the secessionists are so determined to pursue their fundamentalist view of Okinawa as separate that they fail to see the dangers presented by aligning themselves with Chinese territorial ambitions. What we see happening today in the South China Sea will likely happen in the East China Sea as a result of their actions.

In this way, the problem that exists in Okinawa is essentially a fabrication by those possessing an anti-Japan, anti-U.S. way of thinking. It is necessary to make clear that the idea of an indigenous Ryukyu people or the description of the relocation of a base function to northern Okinawa as a "new U.S. base at Henoko," discrimination against Okinawa, heavy burden of the bases, Okinawa's right to self-determination, and oppression by the central government are all, frankly, lies. This is an issue that also affects the prestige and reliability of the United Nations. In this age, the progress in technology has brought an end to demagoguery. This is something these secessionists, these demagogues, should be aware of. This is good news for international society, and matches the principles of the United Nations. The people of Okinawa Prefecture hope that the United Nations and its other bodies have a true understanding of the situation in Okinawa, and not one presented by the secessionists.

Editor Masako Ganaha